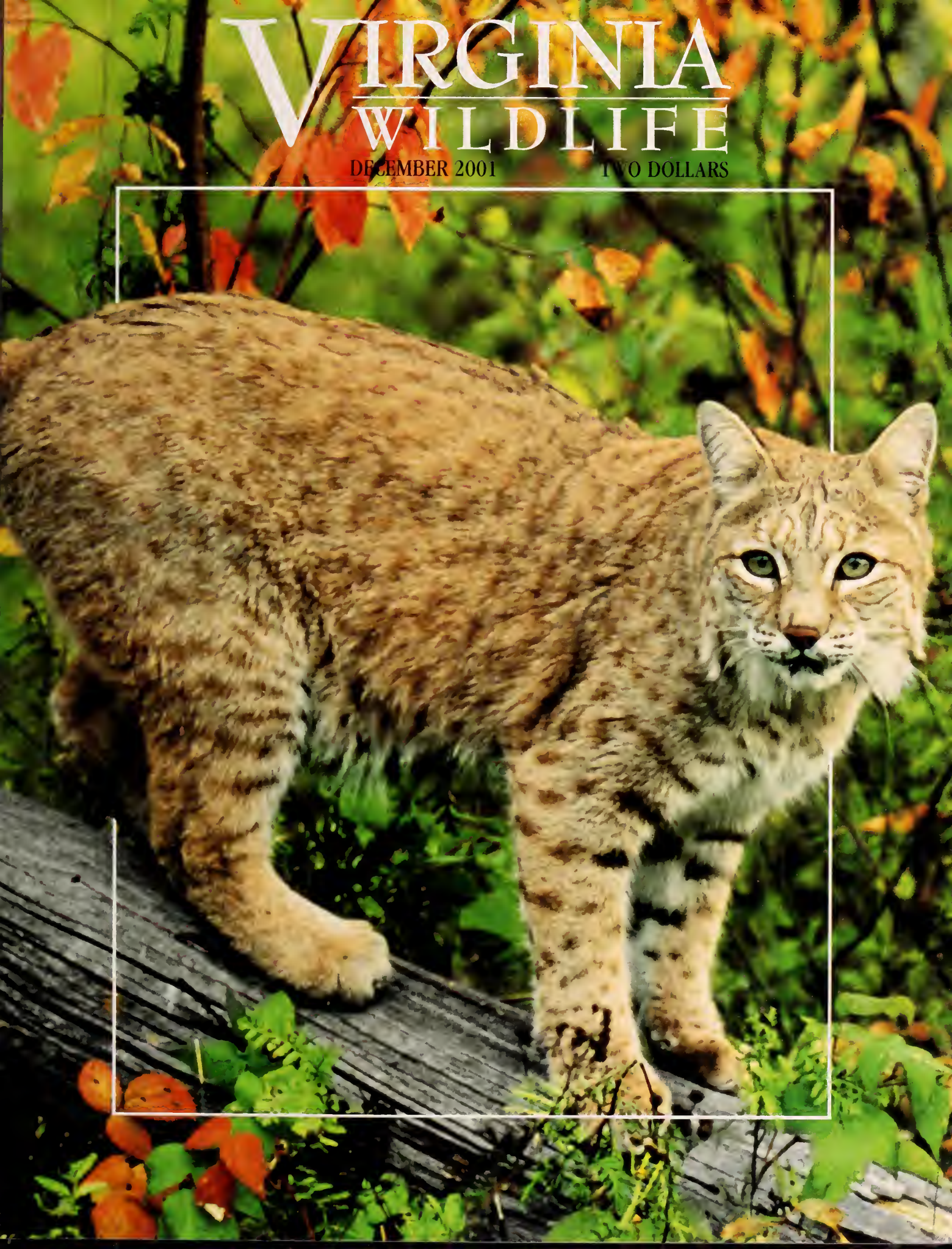
VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

DECEMBER 2001 TWO DOLLARS



Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr

The holidays are nearly here and that means it's time to finish all your gift selections. I sure hope you don't do like me and put off all of your shopping until the last minute. When we do that, all too often we find ourselves asking the big question—what do you get that person who has everything? And this year, we have a great answer for everyone. How about 8,300 acres, four mountains, vast numbers of hardwoods and pines, and an abundance of wildlife? Well, that's just what Virginians are getting with the Commonwealth's newest Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The Big Survey, near Wytheville, is open for business and ready for you and your family to explore and enjoy.

Family members and honored guests gathered on October 18, 2001, for the official dedication of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' newest Wildlife Management Area, Big Survey. **Back row, L to R:** Debbie Charles, Ann and Fred Bagwell, William Huddle, Edwin G. Shaffer, Kim R. Suthers, and William L. Woodfin, Jr., Director VDGIF. **Bottom row, L to R:** Becky Shaffer Peters, Edwina Shaffer Charles, Libby Shaffer Winkler, Terry Huddle, and Rebecca Charles Suthers.

The acquisition of Big Survey brings the total number of WMAs owned by the Department to 33. The property was purchased from The Conservation Fund using proceeds from a treasury loan approved by the Virginia General Assembly. Funds received by the Department from fishing, hunting, and wildlife-associated recreation will be used to repay the loan. In partnership with the Western Virginia Land Trust, The Conservation Fund worked with landowners and the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries on the details and arrangements for the transaction. Outdoor enthusiasts owe a big thanks to state Senator Malfourd "Bo" Trumbo and Delegate A. Victor "Vic" Thomas, who helped spearhead this through the General Assembly, and to the Board of Game and Inland Fisheries and staff who oversaw the transaction.

The history of Big Survey began with a land grant of more than 10,000 acres in 1897. Over the years, members of the Shaffer, Huddle, Wohlford and Trinkle families predominantly held the title to the land. The land has remained almost completely in its natural state and is truly representative of a wilderness.

The action needed for the Department to acquire this expansive 8,300-acre tract was put into motion during the 2000 General Assembly Session. It followed more than six years of citizen and landowner interest in selling the land for conservation purposes. To find out more about our statewide network of Wildlife Management Areas and the new Big Survey WMA, visit our web site at www.dgif.state.va.us.

All of us at the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries hope you enjoy our most recent gift to all Virginians. We wish you a most joyous holiday season and a very prosperous New Year!

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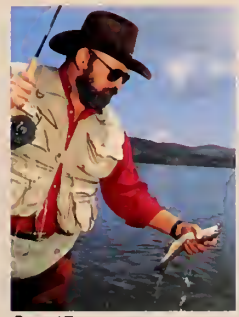

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Cover: The bobcat *(Lynx rufus)* is found throughout much of Virginia and gets its name from its short tail. Males average about 20–25 pounds and their territorial range may encompass as much as 60 miles. Photo ©Bill Lea

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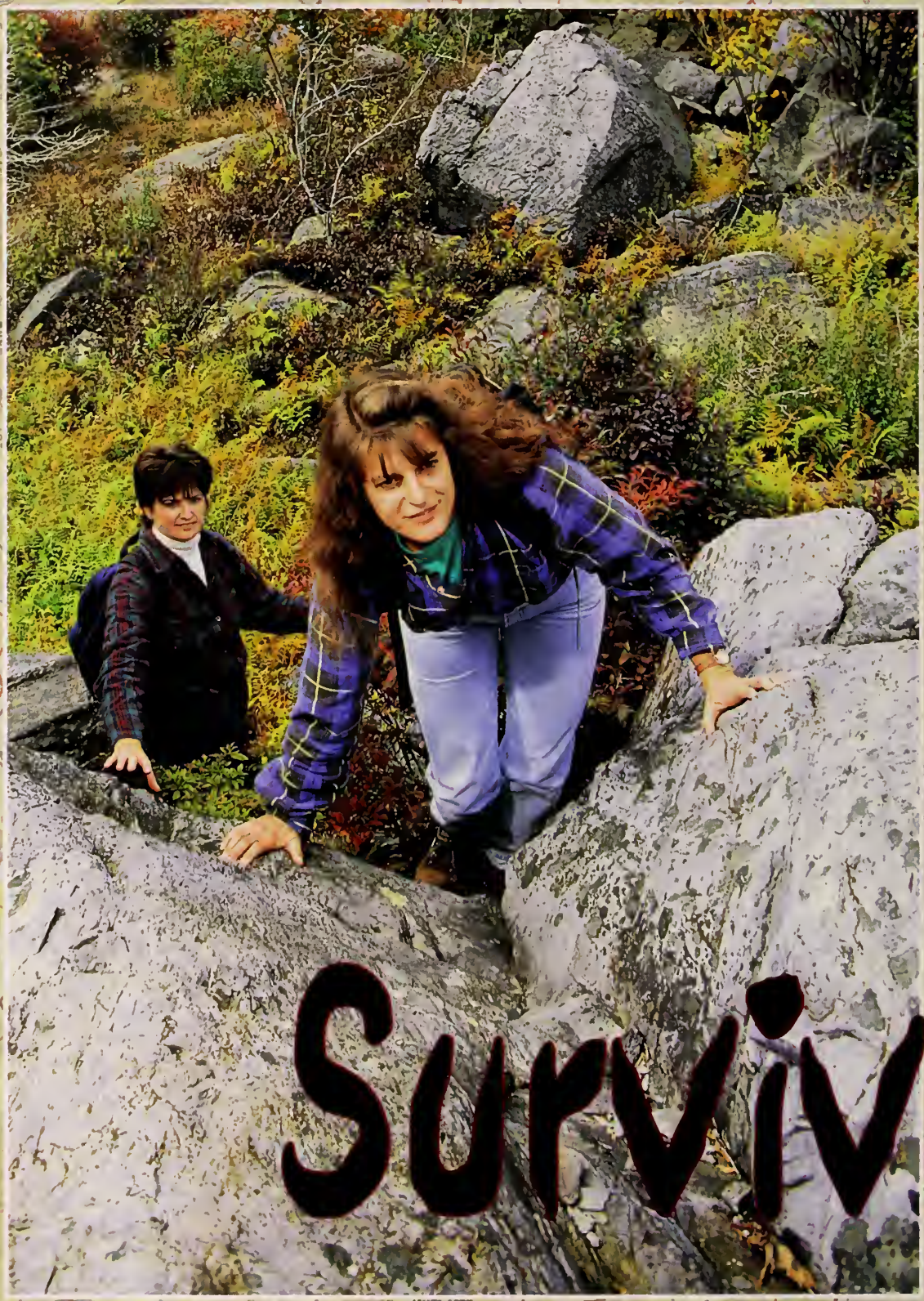
Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

VOLUME 62 NUMBER 12



Survival

Fact From Fiction

Being stranded in the outdoors makes for good television viewing, but would you know what to do if it happened to you?

Author J. C. Gaitley, III, a hunter education and survival instructor, believes that should you ever become lost or hurt while in the outdoors, having a basic knowledge of survival skills could mean the difference between life and death.

by J. C. Gaitley, III
photos by Dwight Dyke

Every year more and more people are trying their hand at venturing into the great outdoors for a number of reasons and have a great time at doing so. However, many are going out hunting, fishing, bird watching, biking, hiking, or camping and are getting into trouble and in some cases even dying. There I said it, the "D" word. Now that it's out of the way, let's dispel what is fact from what is fiction. Just like there are six major food groups to choose from to stay healthy, there are five major survival groups to learn from to stay alive and, to a certain degree, healthy in a survival situation. These groups can be used in any setting, whether it's the frozen tundra, the far north, or in the hottest desert climate.

A Positive Attitude

Before going out each time for whatever outdoor activity you may want to try or already enjoy, make a plan and stick to it. This means making sure you are in shape to do what you want to do and to know your physical and mental limits. Tell someone where you will be, when you will back, and who will be with you. Understanding what fear really is and how to use it to your advantage in a crisis is important. Fear is a condition we have learned all our life, and harnessing it to make us stronger actually calms us in a survival situation. Knowing how to make a fire at dark makes us less afraid of the night. Learning to build a shelter from our natural surroundings will keep us warm and dry, as well as build our confidence. Mastering water collection or plant identification will keep us nour-

ished and strong when we need that strength. Combined, all of these elements will give us the tools to survive in what some might call a hostile environment.

Shelter

Many experts are divided on whether shelter or fire should be second in importance. My personal preference is that if it's snowing and 20 degrees outside I build my shelter first and then try to build a fire for comfort. This is by no means a constant. Careful consideration should be made to use good judgement to figure out which is best for you. Anything can be used as a shelter: caves, overhanging rocks, an uprooted tree that leans over forming a lean-to, or an A-frame are just a few of the many natural shelters that you can find if you are observant and resourceful. Your clothing can also be your best shelter if you dress appropriately. Dress in layers as opposed to one large bulky item. Even with the introduction of polypropylene clothing, nothing works better than wool for fighting off the effects of cold weather. Wool dries faster than most fabrics and retains most of its insulation properties. The best shelter, whether man-made or natural, is the debris hut. This shelter is simple to construct and, if done right, will keep the person warm and dry in all types of inclement weather. Start by finding a main support or ridgepole about 9 feet long and 2–3 inches in diameter. Next find a tree that has a fork in it or a tree branch that is waist high, place the ridge pole in the fork to make a lean-to or an A-frame. Then place sticks, pine boughs, or twigs along the sides of the ridgepole to form the framework of your debris hut. After you have made a tight framework the fun part comes. Start picking up debris off the forest floor and pile it onto your shelter. The more debris you put on the more insulation you will have—it is like adding more blankets to a bed. The outside 2 feet of insulation will keep you warm down to 30 degrees, 3 feet will keep you warm down to 0 degrees, and 4 feet will keep you warm down to minus 40 degrees. Wet or green debris is about ⅓ less effective, and you will need more to gain back that insulation value. Next fill the inside with as much debris as possible, compress it down, and repeat this two more times with the third time being the time you climb into your "cocoon shelter" while pulling the remaining debris up to your door way to close up your little home. Two problems occur that you need to be aware of. You will get dirty and every bug in world will be your houseguest. So, if you want to stay dry and warm, and don't mind dirt or little friends, this is a shelter that can save your life. The last thing that I want to say on shelters is that a good shelter in a bad location is a bad shelter. Look at the area where you want to build a shelter and try to keep these things in mind, protect yourself from the elements, and try to have a well-drained area. Use a southern exposure with the entry facing east. Remember, this is a debris hut and fire safety is important.

Clothing and dressing appropriately, along with seeking or building a shelter, are important elements for surviving inclement weather in the outdoors.

Whether you're using waterproof matches, disposable lighters, flint and steel, or rubbing two sticks together, the art of building a fire is a skill that everyone should master.

Last and least important is comfort as you can get comfortable when you get home.

Fire Building

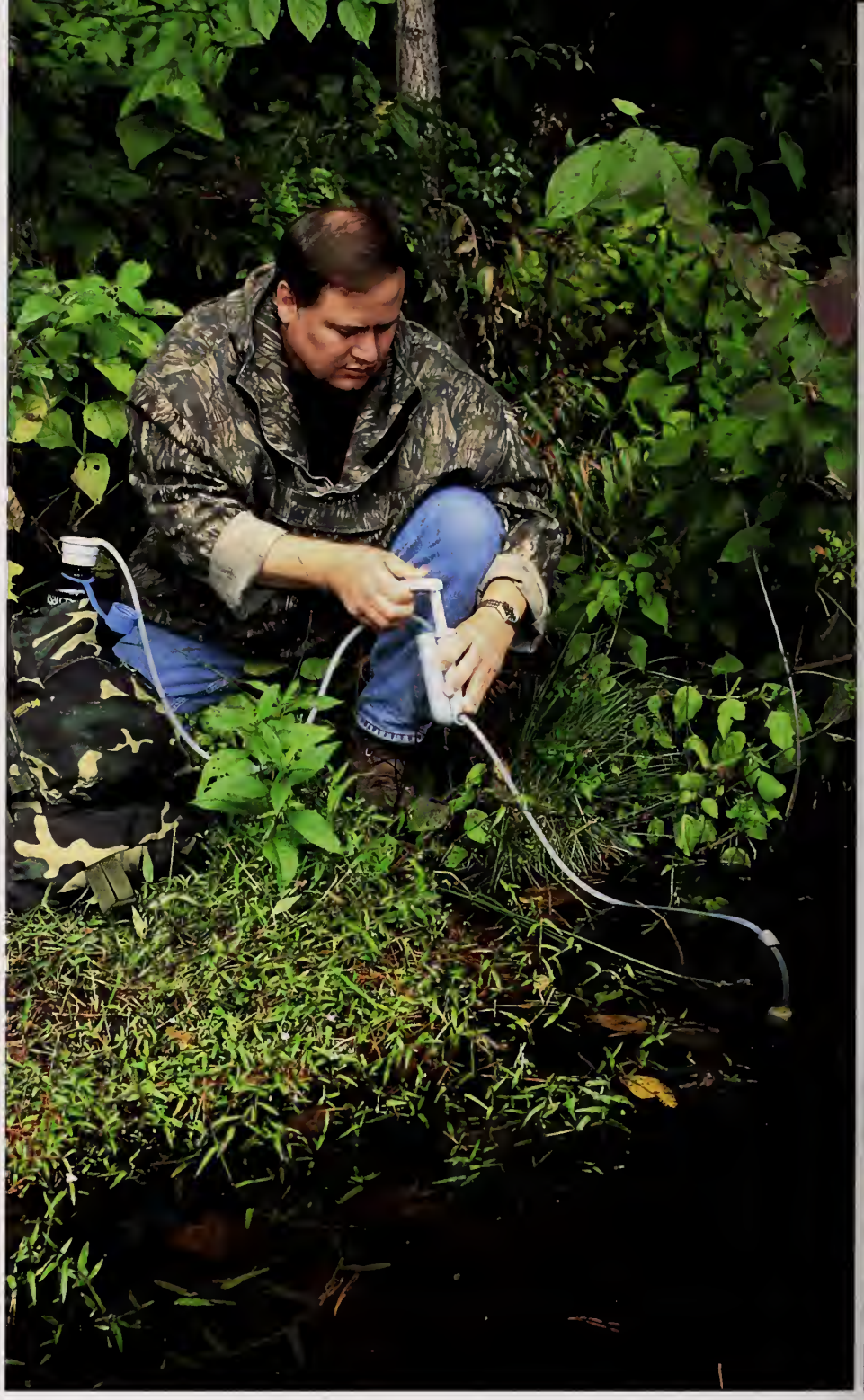
Since the beginning of time when early man first gazed into the glowing embers, he has wondered what a fire could do and how he could use it. Everyone, I hope, has sat in front of a campfire at some point in his or her life and thought about how peaceful and tranquil it was. That is what a fire in a survival situation does. Calming you mentally, providing warmth, or helping others lo-

cate you are just some of benefits of fire and what it can do for you. Making fire is easy if you remember a few simple steps. All fires need oxygen and fuel (natural or chemical) to burn. For a survival fire (not a signaling fire) it needs to be small and the best type is a teepee fire. Start with light, airy, tinder material that catches and spreads a spark easily. Then add kindling made up of tiny twigs, about pencil size, followed by larger pieces of wood. Techniques for friction, sparks, or ignition can be done with waterproof matches or disposable lighters, flint and steel, or the one method I like to use, the magnesium fire starter. Place a small amount of tinder near your teepee fire and use your knife to scrape off some filings of magnesium. Then

use the flint striker on the other side to ignite the tinder with magnesium and quickly place it inside. You can have a fire going in no time once you learn to do it. Like most new lessons, the more you practice the better you will become at starting a fire using many of these methods. Wood must be dry to burn well, so look for as much as you can when first going out for it. Natural places to look in damp weather are the inside of rotten trees, low hanging branches of trees that snap easy, pine needles, cones, and leaves on the ground.

Water Collection

The last two items to discuss are water collection and food gathering. Since most survival situations last between 48 and 72 hours worrying about either is not worth time or effort. However, knowing what to do makes you stronger and more confident. Unless you bring in your own water, suspect most water sources as contaminated. There are three methods for filtering water to make it safe to drink. Boiling water for at least 5 minutes will kill most living organisms that could harm you. Filtering systems (both man-made and natural) also work in most cases, but caution should be taken to make sure that the right micro or purifying filter is being used. Chemicals can be effective if used properly, but caution needs to taken if allergies—like iodine sensitivity—are present.



Learning to obtain drinkable water and gathering edible food (opposite page) can help to fuel the human body and give a person the ability to think more clearly.

Here are some tips when water is an issue. Conserving water helps when not enough is available. Don't eat unless large quantities of water are present, and work or walk at an easy pace. The best storage container for water is your stomach. If you have it drink it. Many a person has been found dead while water still remained in their canteen because they were rationing it. There are other methods for purifying water that work well, but they are complicated—like a solar still and an aspiration still—and would require another whole article. They do produce pure water that needs no other treatment, but you need to practice building and using them.

Food Gathering

The human body is a resilient machine. Even without fuel it runs for a long time on reserves and still rebounds. The body can go for two to three weeks without food if enough water is present. You won't be a happy camper, but you will be alive. Knowing how to identify edible plants is hard, and you need to make sure of anything you put in your mouth. Testing wild plants is not always foolproof. Watching animals eat certain plants (though not poisonous to them) and then trying it yourself can kill you. That's not to say that the "Great Outdoors Supermarket" is closed. You just need to be careful about what you eat and how much. There are many fine books on the subject of plant identification that can be found at most book stores or in your public library. So, If you are not sure read up before munching on any plant.

Stop, Think, Observe, and Plan

Now that you have some tools to start with, let's not forget some basic ideas that can also save your life.

Packing prepared foods or learning how to identify edible plants in the outdoors for food can help to fuel the human body in hard times.

STOP moving, sit down, build a fire, make a cup of tea or soup, relax, and admit that you are lost. THINK about what will happen next. Do I move or stay put, the latter is normally the best idea. Did I bring my survival gear and what else do I have that will keep me alive while I wait. OBSERVE and use your senses. Look around and see what landmarks or familiar surroundings you see. Listen for highway sounds, farm animals, and people talking. Use your nose and check for smells of campfires, cooking, or anything that might say civilization. Finally, PLAN what you are going to do. Make your shelter, build the fire, look for water, and locate your food. Avoid traveling at night. You may injure yourself, which will only make your situation worse. Make a signal fire—three large fires 40 feet apart in a triangle. From a planes point of view 5000 feet in the air this looks small. Blowing hard, three times on a whistle, every minute until you get tired or somebody responds. Your response back is two long blasts.

Conclusion

This article is not intended to make you an expert on survival, but merely to give you some idea of what to expect the next time you go out, what can happen, and how to survive it. Taking a basic survival course and having a good understanding of the outdoors will give you the needed skills: confidence to go further, try new experiences, and enjoy the outdoors to its fullest beauty. Please remember that nothing I can say will personally prepare you for what lies ahead, but knowledge and practiced skills can. □

J.C. Gaitley, III, is a Master Instructor of Hunter Education for the VDGIF, an Advanced Training Instructor of Survival, a Becoming an Outdoors Woman® Chief Survival Instructor, and has over 40 years of outdoor experiences and survival skills.

Basic Survival Kit

Folding lockblade or sheath knife
Compass
First aid kit
Space blanket
Disposable poncho
Parachute cord
Signaling mirror
Whistle
Magnesium fire starter
Water purification tablets
Survival fishing kit (hooks, split-shot, bobber, monofilament line, 15-20 feet)
Hard candy (lifesavers, mints, chewing gum)
Disposable lighter
Waterproof matches in container
3-4 days supply of regularly taken medications
Clear 55-gallon trash bag

Recommended Reading

Tom Brown's Field Guide to Wilderness Survival—Tom Brown Jr.
A Field Guide to Edible Wild Plants—Peterson
Newcomb's Wildflower Guide—Newcomb
A Field Guide to North American Edible Wild Plants—Elias
How to Stay Alive in the Woods—Bradford Angier
The SAS Survival Handbook—John Wiseman

Videos

17 Ways to Start a Fire Without Matches and 100 Other Useful Things—Mel DeWeese and Jim Meuninck

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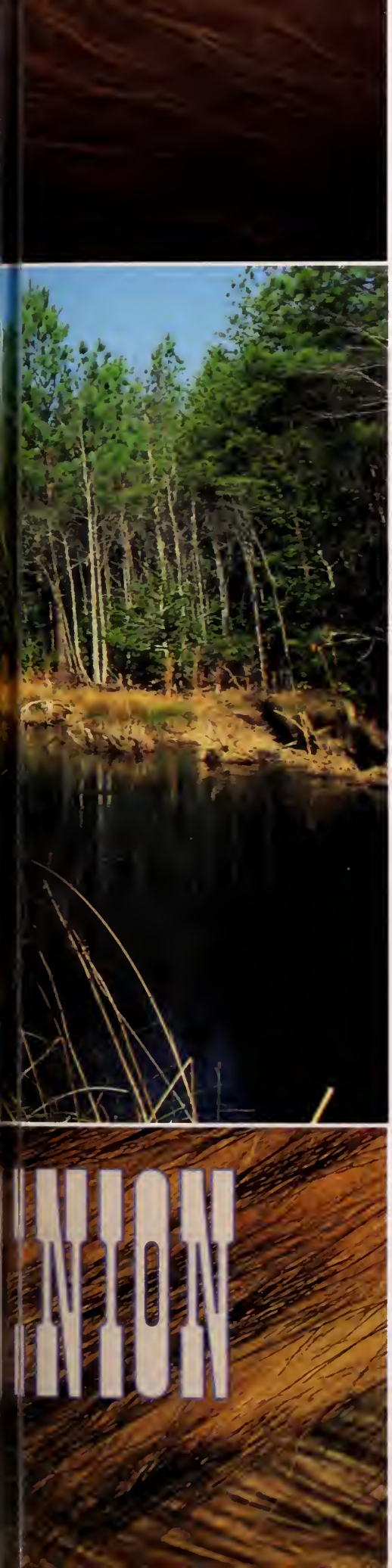
TRAPPING IN THE OLD DOM



by Bob Gooch
photos by Dwight Dyke

The hunter thrills to the thundering flush of a ruffed grouse on a rugged Virginia mountainside, the fisherman's blood pressure soars with the explosive strike of a big bass in a quiet lowland lake, but the trapper also experiences those exciting moments in the great outdoors. That thrill may come as he approaches a set on a cold December morning and hears the unmistakable rattle of his trap chain, or fastens his eager eyes on a trap chain disappearing into the clear creek water. Those are welcome sights and sounds that signal success and send the trapper's blood racing.

Hunting, fishing, and trapping—together they have been an important part of the fiber of life in Virginia since the founding of our nation. Their impact on the economic structure of a struggling young nation and the freedom it fought for is immeasurable. Trappers, particularly, have left their mark all across Virginia and the nation. Beaver Creek, Otter Creek, 'Possum Hollow, Skunk Ridge, Trapper Lake, and the list goes on. Adventurers and hardy trappers were the original frontiersmen as they pushed deep into the wilderness, north and west in search of pockets of rich furbearing animals. The trapping tradition is rich in America. Frontier trappers found a ready market for their furs in Europe, then the Mother Country. That tradition has been cherished by generations of outdoor-loving people of all ages.

In recent years trapping has been declining. Nationally, the trapper population has dropped from 4 million a couple of decades ago to less than 500,000 today. On a more local level, membership in the Virginia Trappers Association (VTA) has dropped from over 1,000 a few years ago to approximately 400 today, according to W. Page Moran, a past president of the organization. "Only the hard core continue to trap," he said recently. "But trapper numbers have been holding steady for the last three years," said Randy Farrar, Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' (VDGIF) fur bearing project leader. "We've been averaging 1,000 to 1,100 trapping licenses for the past three years. And fur prices are beginning to edge upward." One of the problems is finding a place to trap. Still, the trapper might be better off than the hunter in that respect. Many landowners welcome someone who will come in and reduce the beaver population that is flooding their lowlands or catch the foxes raiding the chicken coops. Many property owners are always looking for someone to remove the skunks that have taken up residence beneath a dwelling or outbuilding. In fact in recent years many trappers have turned to nuisance trapping where they can put their skills to work and earn a modest fee.

Like commercial fishing and farming, trapping is a way for people who enjoy working in the outdoors to produce a modest living.

The gradual movement of the population toward urban living has also had its effect on trapping. A city-

dwelling hunter can drive into a rural area to hunt public land or get permission from a private landowner, and spend a day in the field, but the trapper by law, is required to check his traps daily. It takes time and commitment to set even a modest trapline and run it daily. Not an easy job for a city-bound outdoorsman tied to an 8 to 5 job. Unfortunately, few young people are taking up trapping. "Most don't have anyone to teach them," said Farrar. "The Department along with VTA offers trapping education courses to help," he added.

Trapping can be a good wildlife management tool. VDGIF wildlife managers have established the fact that part of the problem with the declining bobwhite quail population is predators, many of which are furbearers such as foxes, opossums, raccoons, and skunks. A vibrant trapper population for years kept these critters under control. Trapping requires dedication and a love and appreciation for the outdoors. Some of the finest people I know are trappers, and from what I have seen, trappers are among the most knowledgeable outdoorsmen in the state. And they are very dedicated individuals. Even when fur prices are at their lowest ebb, the dedicated trappers are out there because they love it. They want to see trapping survive to be passed on to succeeding generations. Because they have to check their traps daily they are out in all

Each spring trappers from around the state gather in Farmville where beaver, mink, fox, raccoon, bobcat, and coyote pelts, collected over the winter, are graded and auctioned.

Like hunting and fishing, trapping has played an important part in our outdoor tradition and has been a key component of wildlife management.

kinds of weather, and after a long day on the trapline they are often up well into the evening hours skinning and caring for their pelts. The complete trapper understands the animal that he seeks and is skilled in handling and preparing wild furs. The modest profit they make doesn't justify the time and effort that could be spent more profitably, in an economic sense, in other ways. They continue to trap because it's in their blood. They are following in the footsteps of some of the greatest outdoorsmen this nation has produced.

Trapping's decline bothers serious trappers. Scott Hartman, of the National Trappers Association, put it in perspective recently. "Because there are so few trappers, trapping as a sport is more vulnerable. But hunters and anglers have to realize that unless all sustainable natural resource users pull together and figure out ways to educate the urban majority, we're all going to lose. Trapping may be the first to go, but it won't be the last."

Most furbearers are considered game animals and are protected by VDGIF. Trapping is well regulated. Furbearers get the same official protection that game and fish do, and the same law enforcement. Seasons are set to protect them during their reproduction seasons and to allow harvest only when the fur is in its prime. Trapping methods and traps have also improved over the years allowing for more humane and efficient harvesting of furbearing animals.

Above: Trapping is regulated and closely monitored by VDGIF. Game wardens like Scott Naff (below) are eager to assist new trappers with the latest trapping methods and the tagging of pelts.

Trappers have always helped to carry their load in generating funds to support wildlife management in Virginia. Like in-state hunters and anglers who pay $12.00 for their basic license and an additional $12.00 for a bear, deer, turkey or trout license, trappers are required to purchase a $35 state trapping license each year.

Around the state, game bird breeders, shooting preserves, and even private industry are experiencing wildlife problems. Page Moran mentioned one company that had a problem of an overpopulation of foxes. "They were even barking at

people who drove into their parking lot. They also feared rabies." And how about beavers flooding driveways and other property? And to whom do these people turn for a solution? The answer is obvious. Experienced trappers. Who else in our modern society has the expertise to deal with such a problem? Modern society needs people with that expertise, and it certainly doesn't produce them.

I personally grew up on a central Virginia farm. A small creek ran through that farm. That creek and that farm became my early training ground for fishing and hunting. It was also my early training ground for trapping. The Great Depression that ravaged the nation didn't really bother us, though it was constantly in the news. One year a colony of muskrats moved in to feed on a lowlands corn crop and that sparked the trapping bug. I ordered some foothold traps from Sears Roebuck, read all I could get my hands on about trapping, and strung out a modest trapline that I checked daily after school. With a little help from my father I skinned the muskrats, made crude board stretchers on which I dried the pelts, and at season's end mailed them off to the same mail order company from which I bought the traps. When my check arrived I immediately sent it back to the same mail order house for an inexpensive single-shot .22 caliber rifle.

The trapping bug that bit me years ago has never left. I can't resist the urge to occasionally string out a modest trapline. And it isn't profit that motivates me! I have empathy for the modern trapper who stays the course despite the obstacles thrown in his path.

There are not a lot of youngsters in our modern, urbanized society who have the opportunity that I did to learn about trapping and come to appreciate it. I worry about them also. And about the anglers and hunters who are slow to appreciate the role that trapping plays in the management of the fish and wildlife they pursue. Anglers, hunters, and trappers. They share a rich American heritage, and they need each other. □

For over 50 years Bob Gooch has been writing about Virginia's rich outdoor heritage. He is an outdoor columnist and has authored many books on hunting and fishing in Virginia. He lives in Troy near Charlottesville.

Trapping Information

To obtain a copy of the current Virginia hunting and trapping regulations booklet or additional information about trapping, contact:

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
4010 W. Broad St.
P.O. Box 11104
Richmond, VA 23230-1104
(804) 367-9369
www.dgif.state.va.us

The National Trappers Association
456 N. Main Street
P. O. Box 550
New Martinsville, WV
(304) 455-2656

Virginia Trappers Association
W. Page Moran
3619 Spring Run Rd.
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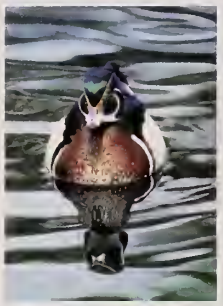
OUTDOOR CATALOG

Virginia Wildlife

Virginia Wildlife OUTDOOR



Virginia Wildlife Posters and Print

VW-2

Freshwater game fish (21" X 36"), below, wood duck, barred owl, white-tailed deer (all 19½" X 27½"), left, or saltwater fish (21¾ "X 34") right. Items VW-1-5. $8.00 each

VW-5

VW-3

VW-1

VW-6

Bats of the Eastern United States (24" X 36"). Includes information about each species found in the eastern United States. Item VW-6. $10.00 each.

VW-4

VW-7

"Winter Comfort" by Bob Henley, a signed and numbered limited edition (950) print (13" X 19½") Item VW-7. $45.00 each.

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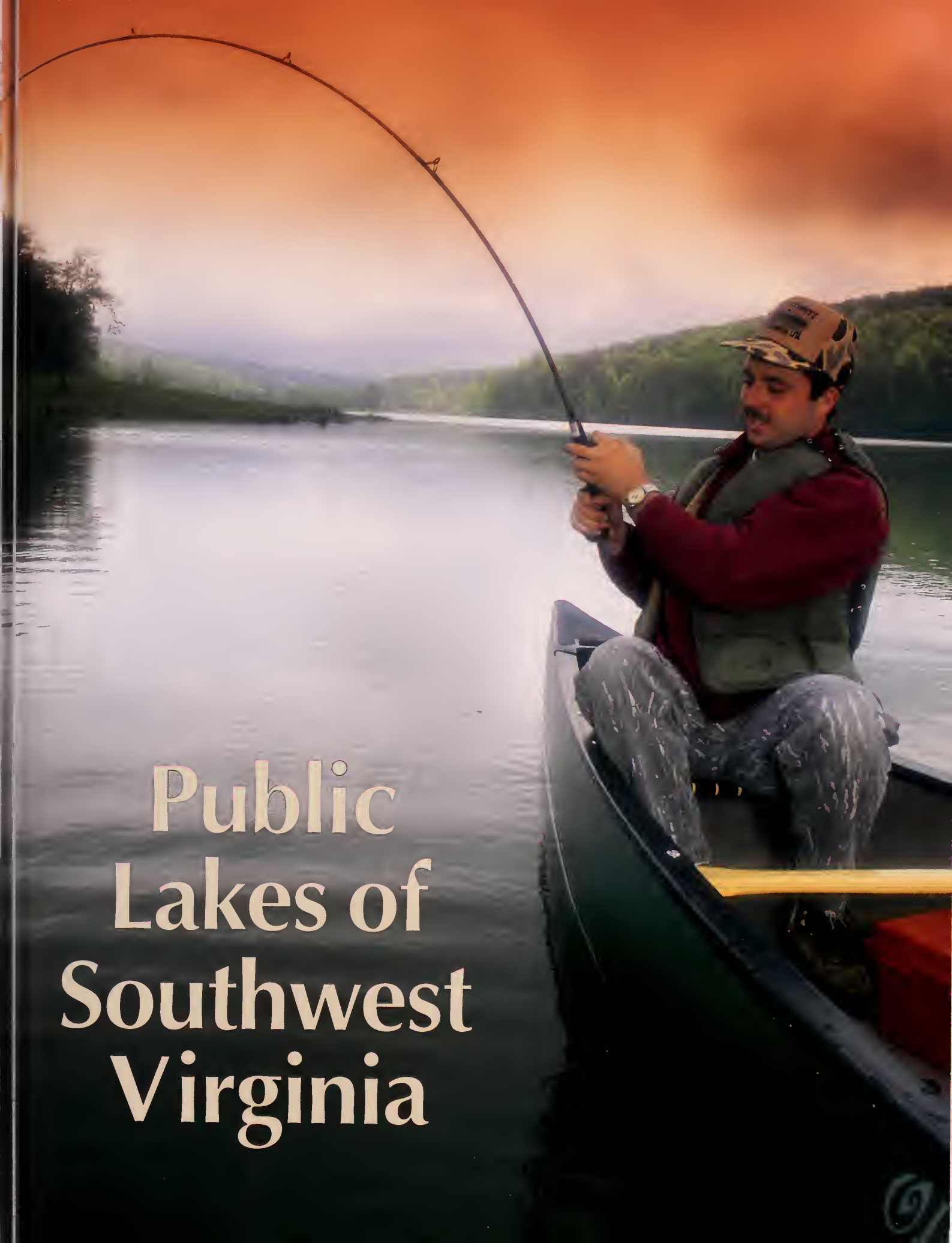

Public Lakes of Southwest Virginia

Cover: Hidden Valley Lake WMA. Above: John Flannagan Reservoir, photos ©Dwight Dyke.

Enjoy the great outdoors among the many public lakes of Southwest Virginia.

Public lakes lie tucked away in far southwestern Virginia—a baker's dozen waiting for discovery.

Southwest Virginia may be best known, among sports enthusiasts, for its National Forests and abundance of wild trout streams. However, nestled within the many mountains and valleys are 13 public lakes that offer their own special recipes for fun. The largest, John Flannagan Reservoir, consists of over 1,100 acres of cool, deep water that harbors trophy bass and walleye. Four lakes shelter huge muskie that roam uncontested, waiting for the lucky angler to entice and snare with that perfect lure. Many of the lakes offer an abundance of gamefish such as largemouth and smallmouth bass, walleye, and trout, as well as the muskie—a diversity unique for Virginia, common for Southwest Virginia.

Plan a trip to the great Southwest, Southwest Virginia that is. Indulge in its special variety of angling opportunities—every angler deserves such a treat.

Public Lakes of Southwest Virginia

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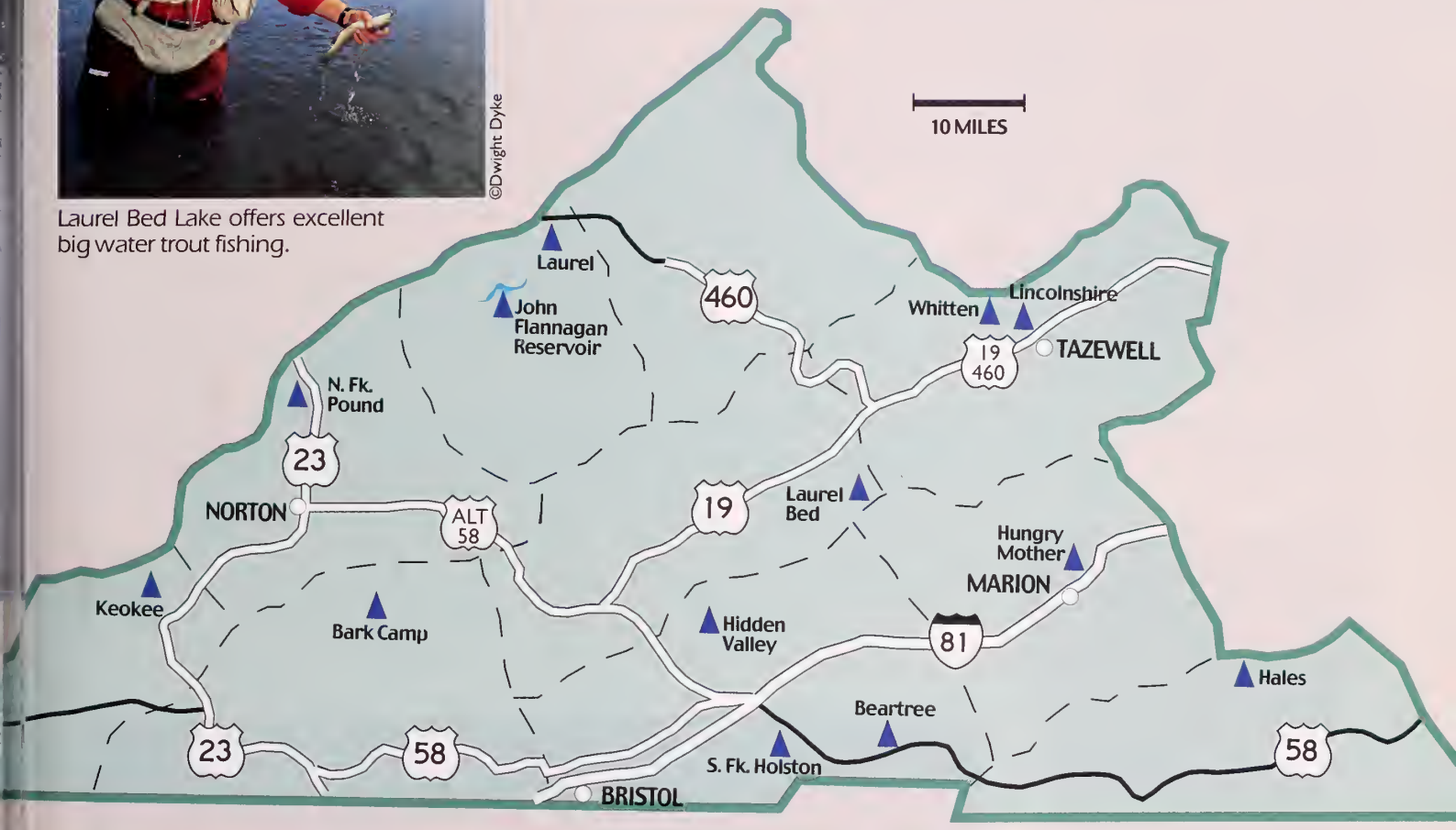
Laurel Bed Lake offers excellent big water trout fishing.



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Far left: If it's great bass fishing on Hungry Mother Lake or enjoying a day on the scenic waters of John Flannagan Reservoir that you're looking for, then Southwest Virginia offers a treasure trove of angling and boating possibilities.

Southwest Virginia

Lake, Size & Location	Permit Req.	Boat Ramp	Picnic Facil.	Gas Motor	Boat Rental	Handi Facil.	Conces. Facil.	LMB BG	SMB	CF	WB	TR	MY	WE
Bark Camp (48 ac) Alt. 58 to Tacoma, Rt. 706 to Rt. 699 to Rt. 822 to U.S.F.S. Rt. 993 to lake.	NF	●	●			●		●		●		●		
Beartree (14 ac) I-81 to Marion (exit 45) and Rt. 16 S to Troutdale, west on Rt. 603 to Rt. 58W to lake.	NF		●			●						●		
John Flannagan (1,143 ac) Alt. 58 to Rt. 63 N to Clincho Rt. 63 to Rt. 616 to Rt. 614 to lake.		●	●	●	●			●,KB	●	●		●		●
Hales (4 ac) I-81 to Marion (exit 45) Rt. 16 S to Sugar Grove and Rt. 614 to Rt. 612 to Rt. 798 to lake.	NF											●		
Hidden Valley (61ac) Abingdon northwest on Alt. 58 to Rt. 690 to lake.		●						●,RBr	●	●				●
Hungry Mother (108 ac) Hungry Mother State Pk. I-81 to Marion (exit 47) to Rt. 16 N to state park and lake.		●	●		●	●		● KB,RBr	●	●			●	●
Keokee (92 ac) Rt. 23 to Rt. 68W at Appalachia to Rt. 606 to Rt. 623 to U.S.F.S. road to lake.	NF	●						●		●				
Laurel (Breaks Interstate Park) Rt. 460 at Vansant to Rt. 83 W to Rt. 80 N to park.								●						
Laurel Bed (300 ac) I-81 to Chilhowie, Rt. 107 NW to Saltville. Signs lead to Clinch Mtn. WMA and lake.	Fee	●										●		
Lincolnshire (20 ac) Rt. 460 at Tazewell.		●						●		●		●	●	
North Fork Pound (154 ac) Rt. 23 to Pound and lake.		●	●	●	●			●,KB	●	●			●	
South Holston (7,580 ac) I-81 to Abingdon (exit 17) Rt. 75 S to Rt. 670 and lake.		●	●	●	●			●,RBr	●	●	●	●	●	●
Witten (52 ac) Rt. 460 to Tazewell and Rt. 16 N to Rt. 643 to lake.		●	●					RBr	●			●		

Key

NF - National Forest Stamp
Fee - Fee & permit available at lake

LMB/BG - Largemouth Bass/Bluegill
KB - Kentucky Bass
RBr - Redbreast Sunfish
SMB - Smallmouth Bass
CF - Catfish
WB - White Bass
TR - Trout
MY - Muskellunge
WE - Walleye

For more information contact:
VDGIF
1796 Highway Sixteen
Marion, VA 24354
(276) 783-4860
www.dgif.state.va.us

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Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

CATALOG

Hats Off to Virginia Wildlife

The staff of *Virginia Wildlife* is proud to offer Virginia Wildlife caps. Each cap is high quality, 100% cotton and embroidered with the *Virginia Wildlife* magazine logo. One size fits all. We have two attractive styles. Item VW-8 $15.00 (high profile) or VW-9 $15.00 (low profile).

low profile
VW-9

high profile
VW-8

ORDER FORM

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VW-13	Oliver Owl	$10		
VW-14	Virginia Wildlife Knife	$75		
VW-15	2001 Commemorative Coin	$20		
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VW-17	Custom Plaque, Oak	$30		
			total amount enclosed	

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All prices include shipping and handling. Make check payable to Treasurer of Virginia, fill out form, clip and mail to Virginia Wildlife Outdoor Catalog, VDGIF, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Please allow three to four weeks for delivery.

VW-10

VDGIF Belt Buckle
Dress up your ensemble with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries 1916-2000 engraved brass belt buckle. Supplies are limited. Item VW-10 $15.00

The Collector's Corner

VW-11

VW-12

Pocket Timepiece

VDGIF has teamed up with the American watch company Jules Jurgensen to offer this elegant timepiece. Each watch is crafted with the old world look of a stag or eagle, engraved with a unique serial number, and carries the VDGIF logo on the dial. This timepiece is sure to become a treasured family keepsake.
Item VW-11. (Stag) or VW-12 (Eagle) $95.00 ea.

VW-13

Oliver Owl

Meet Oliver Owl, the first in a series of collectable wildlife animals. Oliver proudly sports the VDGIF logo, and comes with an introductory card that provides a brief insight into the nature of owls. This is a gift that will surely please children and adults alike. Item VW-13. $10.00.

VW-14

2001 Limited Edition *Virginia Wildlife* Knife

The second in a series of limited edition *Virginia Wildlife* knives customized by Scharade Cutlery and made in the USA. Each knife is serial numbered and includes an attractive leather sheath. And in addition, each blade has been etched with original artwork provided by VDGIF's own wildlife artist Spike Knuth. Item VW-14. $75.00

2001 Commemorative Collector's Coin

This is the first in a series of commemorative collector's coins. Each coin is engraved with the original artwork of a black bear and cub, provided by VDGIF's own wildlife artist, Spike Knuth, and comes in an attractive gift box. Both sides shown. Item VW-15. $20.00.

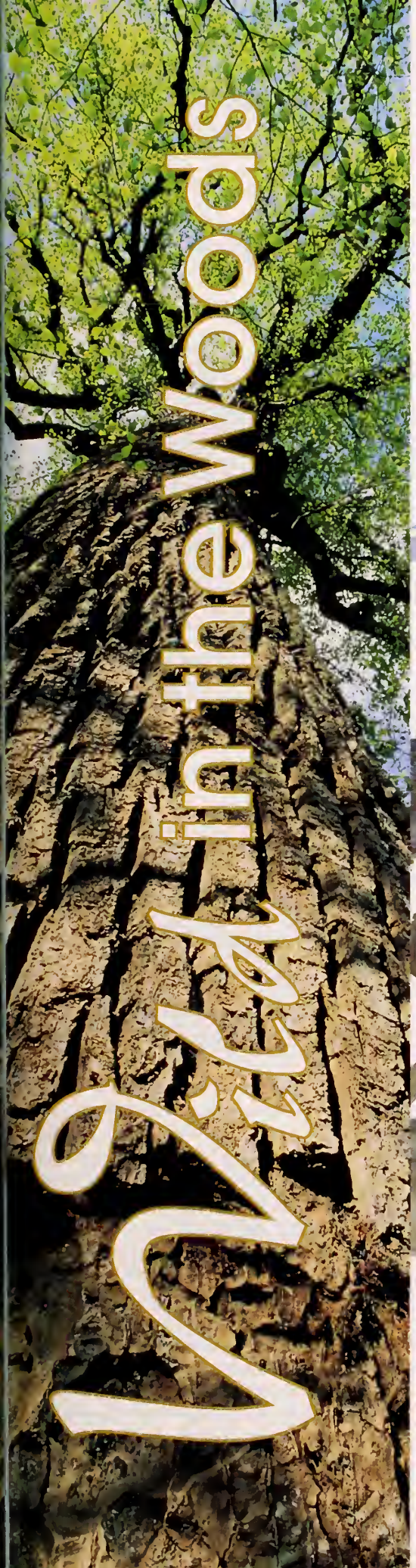
VW-15

VW-16

VW-17

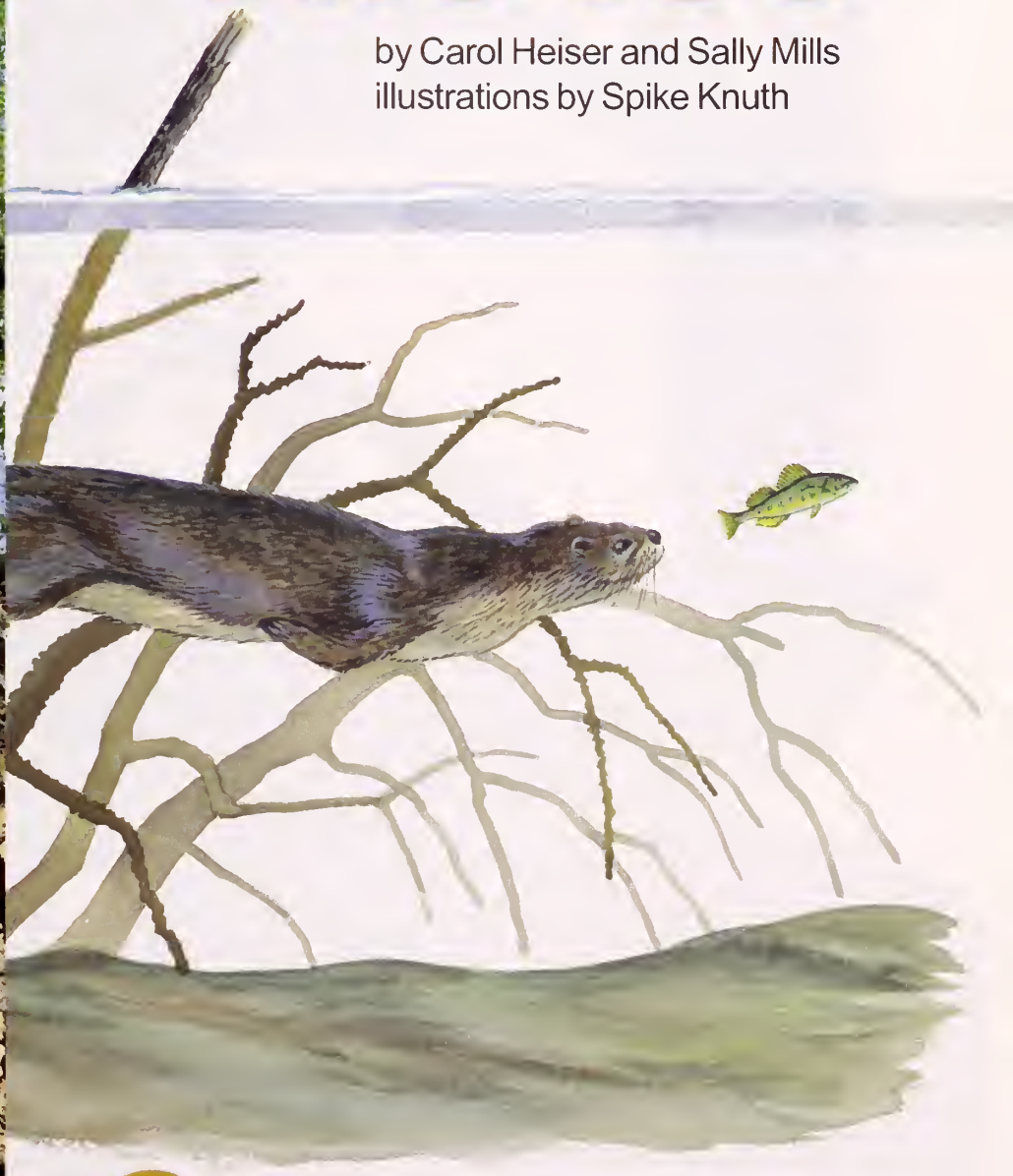
Custom Plaques

Display your trophy fish or hunting certificates as well as other awards with this custom plaque. Each plaque contains two medallions commissioned by VDGIF. Plaques are available in both walnut and oak colors.
Item VW-16. $30.00 (Walnut) or VW-17 (Oak) $30.00 .



Life Below The Ice

by Carol Heiser and Sally Mills
illustrations by Spike Knuth



Come winter, a pond is a precarious place to be. Across the barren landscape, plummeting temperatures and freezing winds challenge the most industrious of pond-dwelling animals. While many terrestrial-based mammals choose to den-up in cavities or burrow under the ground, ponds offer us a rare glimpse of how aquatic plants and animals attempt to ride out winter's chill below the water's slick, icy surface.

Preparing for the Onslaught

The myriad of insects and plants that form the cornerstone of the aquatic food web have developed clever methods to combat winter's challenges. Duckweed, for example, accumulates enough starch in its small, ovular leaf-heads to weight it like an anchor on the pond bottom, and the plant gradually uses this energy store over the winter, feeding upon limited oxygen until spring returns. Other submerged and floating plants will flower in summer, drop their seeds into the water in early fall, and die back later in the season. Their seeds remain dormant in the *substrate* (sediment) at the bottom until April or May when the soil temperature rises—an increase that's critical for germination—and the new plants can begin the cycle all over again.

Many aquatic insects practice the art of burrowing into mud for the winter, and they simply tunnel deeper into the earth to avoid the coldest extremes. Some dispose of bodily fluids and survive upon sugars and fats that are less susceptible to freezing.

Larger members of the pond community are, for the most part, cold-blooded animals like fish, frogs, and turtles. During the big chill, several species burrow into the pond or lake bottom and use the density of surrounding mud to insulate themselves while taking advantage of their elastic-like skin to breathe. Many freshwater fish "beef up" during late summer and fall, in anticipation of the lean months ahead. Some, like the bluegill sunfish, consume less than one percent of their body weight during winter.

Although still active in winter, fish and other aquatic species slow down considerably, eating little, and consuming less oxygen—which may become increasingly scarce in ponds and lakes as winter wears on. Freshwater mussels may be spared from the extreme cold by burrowing into the bottom layers of mud, and decaying plant material that sinks to the bottom may provide them some shelter.

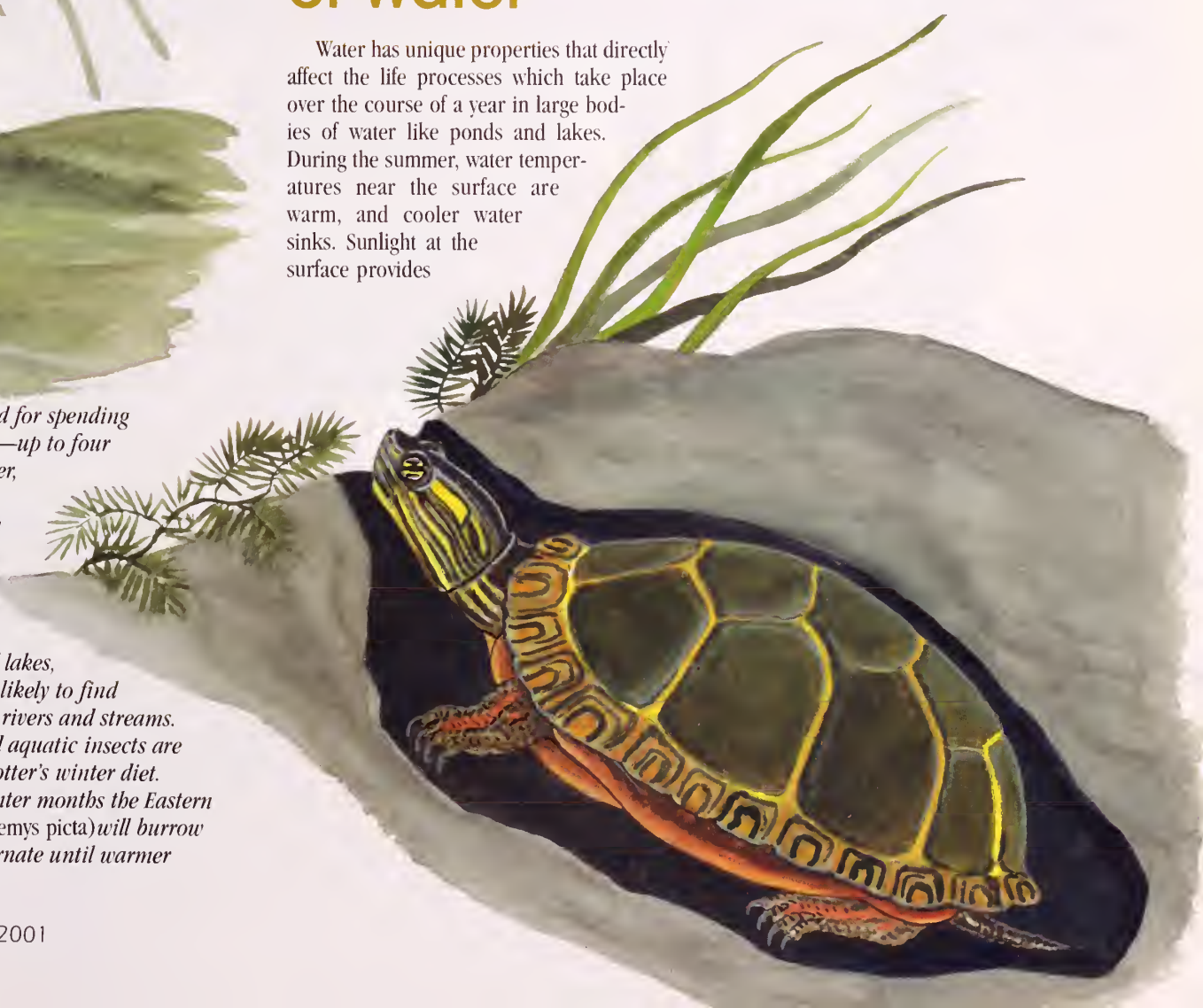
Fishing for Morsels

Several members of the sunfish family are stocked into or are common in Virginia ponds and reservoirs—places like Buggs Island Lake—because of their desirability among sport anglers and their ability to maintain healthy, balanced populations in the aquatic food web. During winter, such fish maintain a restful state throughout the pond. Largemouth bass, for instance, continue feeding upon the occasional crayfish, large insect, or sluggish bluegill, but they consume at a much slower pace. Bluegills and crappies also take an opportunistic stance and vary their diet in winter to accommodate the few morsels available—insects and decaying vegetation.

Layers of Water

Water has unique properties that directly affect the life processes which take place over the course of a year in large bodies of water like ponds and lakes. During the summer, water temperatures near the surface are warm, and cooler water sinks. Sunlight at the surface provides the energy for microscopic plants *(phytoplankton)* and animals *(zooplankton)* to grow and produce nutrients and oxygen. The majority of the fish will be found there as well.

The tiny plankton provide nutrients to the food web and give the water a cloudy appearance; along with other material suspended in the water, they minimize or eliminate sunlight from reaching the bottom. The pond or lake in this summer example has a nutrient-rich, warm layer of water near the surface, called the *epilimnion*, and successively cooler layers that contain less and less dissolved oxygen and nutrients, the deeper you go. This layering process is called *thermal stratification*, which means that zones of water are divided by temperature differences. The coldest layer at the bottom is the *hypolimnion*. In between the top and bottom layers is the *thermocline*, the place where the temperature decreases at the fastest rate with respect to depth. The water temperature at the thermocline in summer is about 50°F.



bove: Highly adapted for spending ›ng periods of time—up to four ıinutes—underwater, iver otters are more ctive in winter than t other times of 'e year. They unt or forage in 'e soft mud at the ottom of ponds and lakes, 'here they are more likely to find ›od than in shallow rivers and streams. 'rayfish, catfish, and aquatic insects are redominant in the otter's winter diet. ight: During the winter months the Eastern ainted turtle (Chrysemys picta)*will burrow ı the mud and hibernate until warmer 'mperatures arrive.*

Winter Turnover

During autumn, however, a significant change takes place; the water at the surface begins to cool, and as it cools it becomes denser or heavier. Water is heaviest at about 39°F, much heavier than the 50°F water down below. The denser water, therefore, sinks to the bottom, and what used to be the deepest layer of water then rises to the top. During the process, the decaying matter and the sediment at the bottom are also mixed as well, and in some lakes and ponds this mixing can turn the water tea-colored. This phenomenon of one layer dropping through the water column and displacing the layer or layers below is appropriately called *turnover*, and it sets up a chain reaction of sorts that affects the distribution of the living creatures within the pond or lake.

When winter turnover is complete and cold weather is persistent, the heavier (39°F) water is found at the bottom, and the lighter (warmer) water is near the surface; hence the reason why ponds freeze on top first. The distinct temperature layers of summer become virtually nonexistent in winter. The nutrients, as well as the oxygen, are mixed relatively evenly throughout. This means that the fish which were formerly found only in the top layers become more evenly distributed throughout the water column.

As long as some sunlight can still penetrate the water during the winter, microbial or bacterial action, which produces oxygen, can still take place, and all is well. If ice and snow happen to completely cover the surface for an extended period of time, no light

will get through, no oxygen will be produced, and the fish and other microscopic plants and animals will use up all the available oxygen and die. This phenomena is known as "winter kill" but is fairly uncommon in Virginia because of our relatively mild winter temperatures. Should a small pond become covered in winter, you can simply shovel off patches of snow or break holes in the ice to allow some sunlight through.

Turnover occurs twice each year in Virginia. When spring arrives, water at the surface warms back up to 39°F. Since that is when water is heaviest, this surface water begins to sink and displace the slightly warmer water at the bottom. The mixing gradually stratifies or layers the water in the pond all over again, and plant and animal life cycles begin anew.

Did You Know?

There are as many as 30 varieties of crayfish found throughout Virginia. Resembling a small lobster, crayfish are crustaceans just like crabs and shrimp, and they are *endemic* (native) to freshwater systems, including streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds. They are also *nocturnal* (active at night) and feed by detecting movement of nearby prey—primarily insects, fish, and worms, as well as plants. Prolific in pond and lake habitats, crayfish overwinter like their amphibian neighbors by burrowing deeper into crevices found in the sides and bottoms of the lake or pond structure, where they remain less active until water temperatures rise in spring.

Pond Lore

When winter finally retreats and spring's warmth returns, a thick soup of insects will once again fill the watery chambers of the landscape. Dragonflies are part of the mix and add colorful drama to any pond setting. As suggested by their long, needle-thin bodies and their tendency to dive down and soar back up as if threading the air, they were once given the nickname, "devil's darning needle."

Dragonflies throughout the centuries have been attributed with magical powers in much folklore. Throughout America's countryside, for example, it was once believed that this insect could seam together lips, eyelids, and other holes in the human anatomy.

Use Your Holiday Tree for Fish Habitat

You can increase the amount of available cover in your pond or lake before winter's freeze by putting in fish attractors, simple constructions of brush and other materials (see illustration on page 28) where fish can congregate to hide from predators—and where anglers can cast to catch more fish. Many Christmas trees are recycled at the end of the holiday season this way, and together with rock piles and stake beds they provide needed structure on the pond floor. For large ponds, one shelter to every three to five acres of water is adequate; in a small pond, one or two attractors should be sufficient. Place the attractor in water that's at least four feet deep. To maximize your angling success, the attractors should also be within casting distance of the shoreline.

Learning More

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries publishes a 22-page, fact-filled guide called *Management of Virginia Ponds for Fishing*. Call the Department's information desk at the Richmond headquarters, (804) 367-9369, to obtain a free copy.

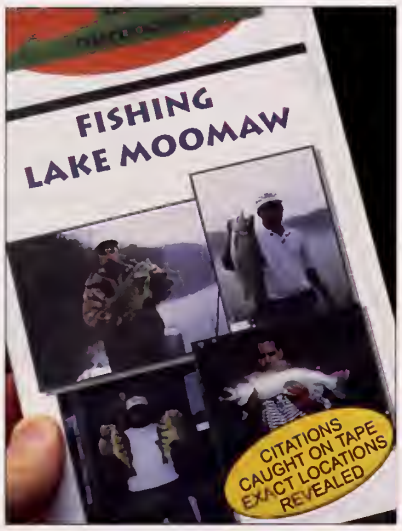
For water science and aquatic education publications and other resources, go to **The Watercourse** Web site based at Montana State University, **www.montana.edu/wwwwater/index.html**. The Watercourse is a national co-sponsor of **Project WET**, a water education program administered in Virginia by the Department of Environmental Quality (**www.deq.state.va.us/education/eeres.html**). More water-related links and information can also be found at the U.S. Department of the Interior's **Watershare** Web site, **www.watershare.mp.usbr.gov**.

Sally Mills is an outdoor writer and editor for Virginia Sea Grant *at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science.*
Carol Heiser is a Wildlife Habitat Education Coordinator at the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Virginia Naturally

Construct a square frame to enclose brush, or build a "reef" of pyramidal shelters by tying a float to the top of each tree and masonry blocks to its stump. Construct brush bundles with branches no larger than two inches in diameter, tied loosely with nylon or plastic rope, and sink them with three or four masonry blocks per bundle. Other materials such as old tires can also be held down with blocks or cement.

Journal



Lake Moomaw Video

reviewed by King Montgomery

Fishing Lake Moomaw, from Old Dominion Outdoors, hosted by Neil Renouf, is 74 action-packed minutes on a very pretty lake full of some big fish. I have never been to Lake Moomaw, but after watching the tape, I know I'm going there for sure, and I know who to call for information and, hopefully, for guiding as well.

The tape shows 11 specific fishing locations on the lake for finding trophy smallmouth bass, brown and rainbow trout, yellow perch (some of the largest I've ever seen on video tape), and sunfishes. Neil Renouf, a personable Richmond area painting contractor, when he's not fishing, hunting, or hosting outdoor videos, demonstrates how to read Moomaw's diverse fish-holding structure and contours, and which lure or bait to use for the fish species you're looking for. He provides tackle tips and angling techniques, too. Renouf has been recognized by VDGIF for his angling prowess. Some of his awards include Lifetime Expert Angler for 10 citation yellow perch, and Master Angler for 5 citations for different species of fish. He's very well qualified to take you on this interesting tour of Lake Moomaw.

The video is very nicely photographed. I had no idea how beautiful Lake Moomaw and surroundings are, and I'm looking forward to visiting the area someday soon. And I'm really looking forward to wearing out some of those bass, trout, yellow perch, and sunfishes. I'll be sure to refer to this video again before I go.

The *Fishing Lake Moomaw* videotape is in many tackle shops or send $22.95 to Neil Renouf, 2401 Salua Drive, Richmond, VA 23228. The cost includes shipping. For more information, call Renouf at (804) 266-1469 or olddominionoutdoors.com.

Wallhanger Lets You Bring Home the Big One

reviewed by Ken Perrotte

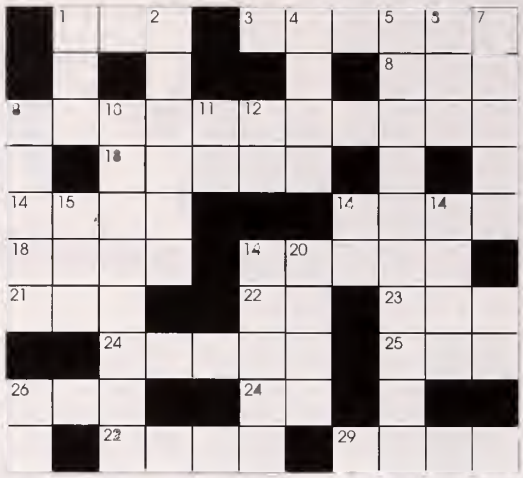
There I was—sitting in a spruce forest somewhere out west, 20 feet up in a treestand, hunting elk with a muzzleloader. Deer and cow elk kept passing by out of range. Finally, one big cow elk sauntered extremely close, its hooves raising a clatter on the dry ground. It paused when I softly hit the call.

So much meat on the hoof! I raised my smokepole, aimed and squeezed. The big cow toppled over. My elation was short-lived, though, as the next experience was jail bars slamming in my face. Unwisely, I had taken the cow when I only had a bull elk tag in my virtual pocket. With a click of the mouse, I got out of jail and started playing again.

Such is the life when you're big game hunting at your computer monitor with the new "Wallhanger" game by PSR Outdoors. The game, created by Larry Jones, of Smithfield, Va., debuted this summer at the Virginia Outdoor Sportsman's Show in Richmond. It's not as high speed as some of the other computer hunting games on the market, but it didn't keep locking up my system as much as the memory hogs.

Wallhanger consumes just a fraction of the memory as other games. With Wallhanger you hunt either deer or elk, using bow, muzzleloader, or rifle. You get a minimal amount of gear to select, versus other games, such as some of Cabela's games, which force you to shop their catalog for gear before you're allowed to hunt.

Sometimes, simple is better. When I'm on a computer hunting game, I want action—fast. I couldn't stand true virtual reality when it comes to hunting; I mean an average of 10 days to bag a deer? Wallhanger sells for $20. Call PSR Outdoors at (757) 365-0448 to order, or check them out online at www.psroutdoors.com. □



BY NEST CROSSWORD

Test your skills on the crossword puzzle. Most of the clues and answers were published in *Virginia Wildlife* over a recent 12 month period.

ACROSS

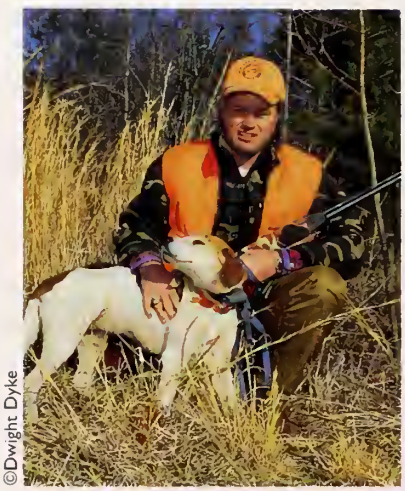
1 Nocturnal one that flies with its webbed-wing hands.
3 Seashores.
8 Female fowl.
9 Butterfly or moth.
13 Racks for drying fish.
14 Rotary device attached to rod.
16 Clapper (bird).
18 Dates or events forming the beginning of any distinctive period.
19 Large, stately aquatic birds.
21 Air bag system (abbr.)
22 Suffix used in formation of ordinal numbers.
24 Seaweed.
25 Nocturnal bird of prey.
26 Wild animal lair or shelter.
27 Opposite of Old Testament (abbr.).
28 Tailless amphibian akin to a frog.
29 Herring.

DOWN

1 Drone or queen insect.
2 Hunting dog games.
4 Expression of dismay or surprise.
5 Virginia river or valley.
6 Land and waters belonging to the state (abbr.).
7 Gastropod. mollusk, escargot.
9 Mr. Rapidan Parachute, Black Wooly Bugger, and Bead Head Squirrel Nymph.
10 Ring-necked fowl.
11 City on the Potomac River (abbr.).
12 All right or doing well.
15 To be mistaken or incorrect.
16 Sun god of Heliopolis.
17 "…three ships come sailing in…" (song).
19 Hunter tree seat.
20 Northern Saw-____ (bird) or to sharpen a tool.
26 To perform

Marika Byrd, CPS, is the office manager for Virginia Wildlife *magazine and a crossword aficionado.*

Give The Gift That Lasts a Lifetime



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P.O. Box 11102
Richmond, VA 23230-1104
(804) 367-1076 or 9369

©Dwight Dyke

RECIPES

by Joan Cone

Goose For The Holidays

With more of us taking advantage of migratory and resident goose seasons, we can look forward to using these wonderful waterfowl for our holiday dinner.

The following recipe is for goose breast, so be sure to wrap and freeze the thighs and legs for future meals. A good way to prepare these for casseroles and salads is to cook them in a crockpot. This ensures tender meat easily removed from the bones.

Menu

Blue Cheese Appetizers
Apricot-Mustard Goose Breast
Sweet Potato Casserole
Balsamic Cauliflower
Christmas Cobbler

Blue Cheese Appetizers

3 ounces blue cheese
½ cup ricotta cheese
2 tablespoons yogurt
1 teaspoon dried dillweed

In food processor, combine all ingredients and process until creamy and smooth. Serve as a dip with crackers or vegetables. Serves 4 to 6.

Apricot-Mustard Goose Breast

1 whole bone-in goose breast, (2 to 3 pounds), skin on
Salt and pepper to taste
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
½ cup apricot preserves
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard

Preheat oven to 350°F. Sprinkle goose breast with salt and pepper. Line a 13 x 9-inch roasting pan with foil. Place breast skin-side-up in pan and brush breast with oil. Cover with foil and roast for 1 hour. In small bowl, combine preserves and mustard. Remove foil and brush half of preserve mixture over breast. Roast uncovered for 40 to 50 minutes or until internal temperature in thickest part of breast registers 180°F. Brush with remaining apricot-mustard mixture. Let stand, tented with foil, for 10 minutes before carving. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

Sweet Potato Casserole

3 cups cooked, mashed sweet potatoes
¼ cup sugar
2 tablespoons margarine or butter
½ cup egg substitute
½ cup raisins (optional)
1 teaspoon vanilla

Whip sweet potatoes while hot. Add remaining ingredients; mix well. Pour into a greased casserole dish. Top with following mixture and bake at 350°F. for 20 to 25 minutes. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

Topping:

½ cup brown sugar
2 tablespoons flour
2 tablespoons margarine or butter, melted
¼ cup chopped pecans

Combine all ingredients, place on top of potatoes and bake.

Balsamic Cauliflower

1 medium head cauliflower
3 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
Salt to taste
Garlic powder to taste

Remove large outer leaves of cauliflower and break cauliflower into flowerets. Arrange cauliflower in a steaming rack. Place over boiling water, cover and steam for 5 to 8 minutes or to desired degree of doneness. Transfer to a serving bowl and keep warm. Combine olive oil and remaining ingredients in a saucepan; cook over medium heat until mixture is thoroughly heated. Pour hot mixture over cauliflower, toss gently and serve warm. Makes 4 servings.

Christmas Cobbler

½ cup light corn syrup
⅓ cup sugar
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1½ cups fresh or frozen cranberries
2 medium pears, unpeeled, sliced
¾ cup flour
½ cup sugar
⅓ cup butter or margarine
1 cup uncooked oats, quick or old fashion
1 egg, slightly beaten

Preheat oven to 400°F. Grease a 9-inch square or round baking pan. In medium saucepan, combine first 3 ingredients. Stir in cranberries. Heat to boil and reduce heat. Simmer 5 minutes or until cranberries pop open. Stir in pears and then pour into pan. Combine flour and ½ cup sugar. Cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Stir in oats, mixing well. Add egg, mixing until moistened. Crumble evenly over fruit. Bake 30 to 35 minutes or until top is golden brown. Makes 8 servings. ☐

©Joe Mac Hudspeth Jr.

On The Water

by Jim Crosby, Region 4 Boater Education Coordinator

A Boater's Holiday List

As a recreational boater, you will want to make sure you place this column where your loved ones will be certain to see it, because we're going to talk about potential holiday gifts for your hobby.

The only recreational boater who wouldn't appreciate an item from the following list has to be one who already has that particular item.

The hottest item among recreational boaters today is the new inflatable life vests. They overcome all the reasons one can think of for not wearing a personal flotation device while working on the water—a safety practice demanded of all personnel on duty with the Coast Guard and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. The new inflatable ones are light, not bulky and cool to wear. New models have recently been approved for children to wear. If your boater doesn't have one, I would put it at the top of the list because you really want to keep your loved one safe.

You might even consider adding to that life vest an emergency strobe light, chemical light stick, and whistle—items that will definitely come in handy for a fall overboard. I even have a waterproof pouch of three aerial visual distress signals in the pocket of my life vest because if I go overboard at night, I really want to let someone know where to find me. I have found my wristwatch with a fluxgate compass to be real handy for taking an impromptu bearing. On a recent dinner cruise, my wife asked, "I wonder which way we're headed?" I pointed the arrow on my watch toward the bow and punched the button. The numbers indicated the compass heading and answered her question.

Enjoying the pleasures of my boat, I am always finding loose screws or having difficulty with this fitting or another. I have found that carrying one of those multi-purpose tools on your belt is a real convenience. Most of the major knife manufacturers have one version or another. The Leatherman was the first, I believe, but it didn't take long for every company to come up with their own model. One caution, don't settle for one of the cheap imitations because they will pinch, cut, or otherwise make their use uncomfortable and dangerous.

Another great item I have found to be very useful around the boat is one of those miniature flashlights that you can wear in a holster on your belt. I've used one to light the reflector tape on buoys while navigating a channel at night. They will light up the buoy long before you can spot it with the naked eye. Even in the daytime, there is always a dark lazarette or locker to inspect. I prefer the watertight, all aluminum one because they survive best afloat. I even saw a friend accidentally drop one overboard and it stayed lit all the way out of sight as it sank toward the bottom.

While the list can go on and on, I'll finish up with adding a good pair of non-glare sunglasses to protect the eyes, a wide brim hat to protect the nose, ears, neck, and face from severe sunburn and a loose fitting, light colored, long sleeve shirt and pants for that same sunburn protection. I have spent too many Monday evenings sprawled on a lounge chair in front of the TV with wet towels draped over my arms and legs to reduce the heat stored there by the weekend sun. ☐

Lee Walker

Wild Backyard

by Marlene A. Condon

Common Trumpet Creeper

One of my favorite plants is the common trumpet creeper or trumpet vine *(Campsis radicans)* that is native to Virginia. Growing 30–40 feet long, this vine is a fantastic plant for wildlife as well as a beautiful garden plant for people.

Because trumpet vine is a rampant grower in roadside thickets, old fields, and on rocky hillsides, many folks think of this plant as a "weed" that is difficult to control. However, the alert gardener who does not want more than one trumpet vine need only pull out the few seedlings that come up each year.

Trumpet creeper produces pretty, pinnately compound leaves and tubular orangy-red flowers that look great right up until frost. Its own beauty is accented by the ruby-throated hummingbirds that hang around these flowers all summer long for their nectar. In winter, tufted titmice, American goldfinches, dark-eyed juncos, and gray squirrels eat the trumpet vine seeds.

Common trumpet creeper produces the most blooms in full sun (6–8 hours of sunlight a day). Use it to cover a fence, to climb up a trellis, or to grow along a porch or deck.

Collect the seeds from wild plants anytime after the pods have turned brown in the fall. The seeds germinate after a cool spell so it is best to plant them right away (barely cover them with soil). If you prefer to buy cultivars (**cult**ivated **var**ieties) from a nursery, I highly recommend "Mme. Galen," a French form that produces gorgeous red flowers.

When common trumpet creeper first starts growing, tie the vine to the object that you want it to climb so that it will grow in the right direction. Eventually the stem becomes woody with age and puts out rootlets. As a result, the vine eventually holds itself up so that you no longer need to tie it.

Shortly before common trumpet creeper leafs out in late spring, prune back the woody stems as much as you want. The new growth spreads quickly and flowers that same year.

Then all you have to do is sit back and enjoy the visits from wildlife! ☐

These lovely red flowers of the common trumpet creeper hold lots of nectar for ruby-throated hummingbirds.

Hungry grey squirrels will often break open the common trumpet creeper pods for the seeds. Photos ©Marlene Condon.

Naturally Wild

story and illustration
by Spike Knuth

Mockingbird

Winter brings an almost eerie silence to the woods, fields, and backyards. The songs of breeding birds have long be silent. Mostly we hear bands of crows and marauding blue jays, chattering woodpeckers, or scolding chickadees. However, there is one feathered dynamo that continues to sing in fall and even into winter.

The mockingbird is in the family "Mimidae," or mimic thrushes, which includes the brown thrasher and the catbird. Measuring 9–11 inches in length, the mockingbird has a long, rounded tail, with white outer feathers. Its upper parts are grayish or brownish-gray, and its underparts dirty white, with flanks washed with gray. Its rounded wings have large white wing patches. It is an especially active bird—almost hyper! It often dashes about its territory from perch to perch in buoyant flight, with wings and tail flashing white, singing a seemingly unending variety of songs and calls.

Its scientific name is *Mimic polyglotus*, meaning "a mimic" and "many-tongued." Mockingbirds can imitate just about any bird that it has come in contact with, plus it has its own little repertoire, which it often slips in between its imitations. The male bird will make regular rounds from specific perches, at the top of a naked branch, or on a chimney, rooftop, or light pole. He'll sing incessantly during the breeding season.

Mockingbirds sing at night as well, especially during the nesting season on moonlit nights. Those who have experienced it know about those 3:00 a.m. songfests!

Mockingbirds are especially territorial, and they defend their ground with great vigor from other birds, as well as dogs, cats, squirrels, and people. Even in winter, if you have a feeder up that is attracting hoards of birds, Mr. Mockingbird will go nuts to the point of frustration trying to chase everyone out of "his" area.

Mockingbirds feed mostly on insects in spring and summer. They have an unusual feeding habit of running over the ground then raising and flicking, or flashing its wings. The activity is thought to scare up insects by the movement and shadow it causes. In fall and winter, they turn to wild fruits and berries.

Mockingbirds nest beginning in April, having a special liking for dense shrubs and low growing trees. The female builds a loosely woven affair of twigs, plant fibers, string, cloth, hair—even paper shreds. The three to five eggs are a pale greenish-blue, and are spotted and splashed with a deep reddish-brown. The young hatch in about 14 days and fledge a couple of weeks later.

More northerly-breeding mockingbirds will migrate south to warmer areas, but those in the south usually remain around their breeding grounds throughout the year. □

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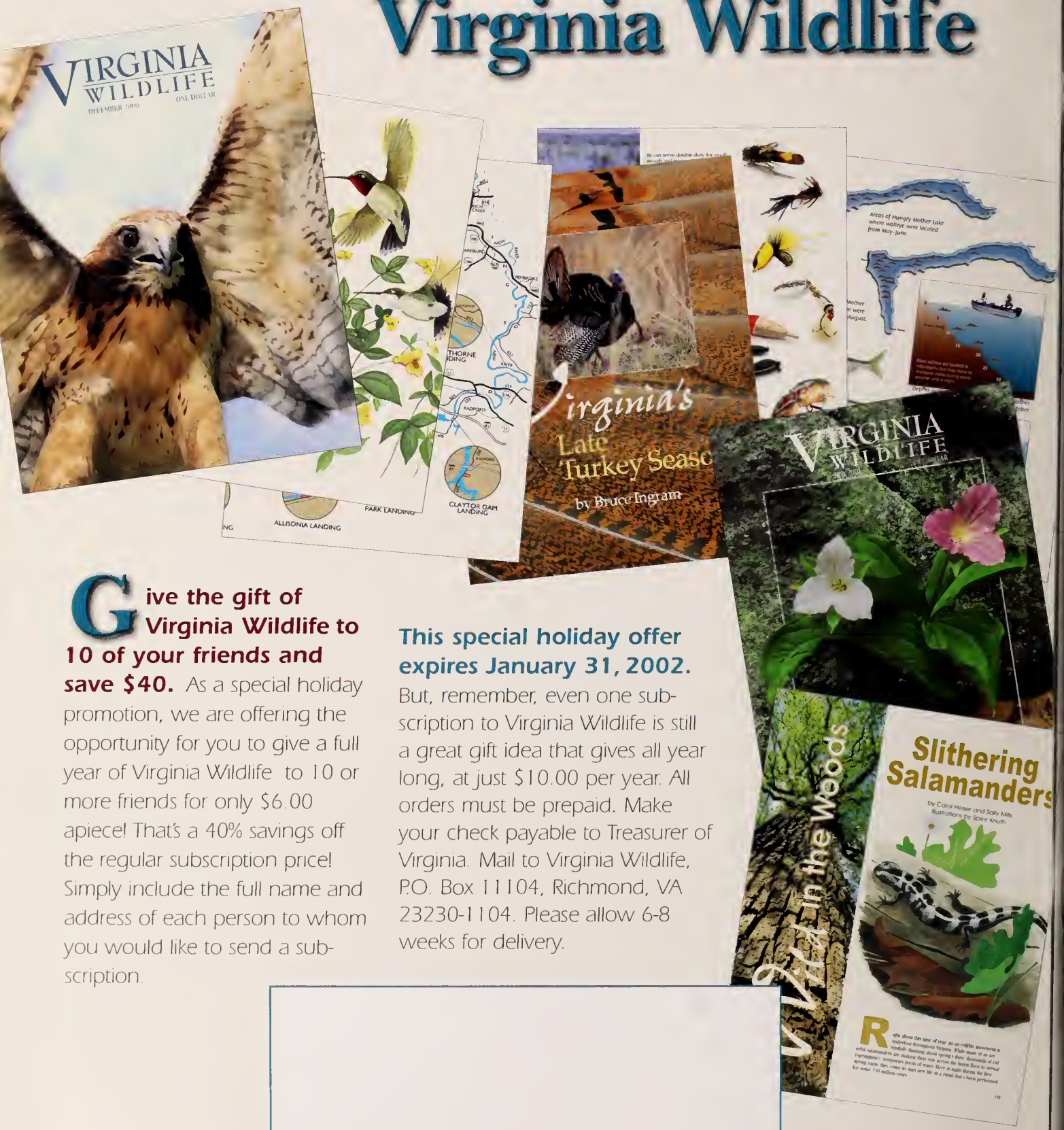

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